WOMEN REDEFINING DEMOCRACY FOR PEACE, JUSTICE AND EQUALITY
ANTIGUA, GUATEMALA: MAY 10 – 12, 2009
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By Mia MacDonald

RINGING DOWN WALLS

One of the Burmese activists in exile who attended used a pseudonym, due to the risk to women's equality and power. But the conference's mandate was also clear: for women in Zimbabwe, if there ever was a time to come together and make change, this is it.

Another thread of conversation explored in the conference was the power of women learning from each other's experiences across regions. At an informal lunch session, activists from Zimbabwe discussed their country's slow recovery from the rapacious policies of long-time president Robert Mugabe under a power-sharing deal with the opposition. Hope Chigudu and Teresa Mugadza were informed that they were prohibited from leaving the country when they were about to board their flight in Tehran. Oft Mohammadi, had their passports confiscated as they were to board their flight in Tehran. Officials informed them that they were prohibited from leaving the country.

Others came from conflict zones such as Sri Lanka that threaten them in a country still recovering from a brutal, four-decade-long civil war that took the lives of 200,000 civilians, 26% of the country's population with indigenous (Maya) origins. It's hardly surprising that a major theme of the conference was women's resilience and resourcefulness in advancing democracy in difficult terrain.

The Nobel Women's Initiative (co-founders attending—Shirin Ebadi, Mairead Maguire, Rigoberta Menchú Tum and Jody Williams—outlined the conference's objectives and agenda of the Nobel Women's Initiative conference held in Antigua, Guatemala, in the shadow of three volcanoes, was conducive to connection, individual reflection, and the unleashing of women's power.

Despite resistance, opposition and threats of violence, there are myriad opportunities for women to expand their participation in and influence on governance systems. In doing so, the possibility exists for a transformation of democracy, and with it, a transformation of the world as a whole. The conference setting, a historic hotel high in the hills outside Guatemala City, in the shadow of three volcanoes, was conducive to connection, shared deliberations, and risks to women's equality and power. But the conference's mandate was also clear: for women in Zimbabwe, if there ever was a time to come together and make change, this is it.

The context was multi-part: a global financial crisis, wars large and small, persistent deficits of democracy or a lack of it altogether, wars large and small, entrenchment of gender-based violence, and accelerating climate change. All pose challenges to women's equality and power. But the conference's mandate was also clear:

"there is certain to be serious discussion of ways to strengthen democratic space. Solome Nakaweesi Kimbugwe offered a spirited overview of how Generation X feminists are working with "audacity" across Africa. They're taking on new issues, including the identity of sexuality and the diversity of African women, while learning from those who went before."

Another discussion focused on strategies to strengthen women's role in peace building, and ways of securing equal rights from skeptical or hostile governments and their supporters. Younger feminists were encouraged throughout the conference to engage with new models of organizing they are using to expand democratic space.

The agenda of the Nobel Women's Initiative conference held in Antigua, Guatemala was broad and urgent. How are women refashioning democracy for peace, justice and equality? The context was multi-part: a global financial crisis, wars large and small, entrenchment of gender-based violence, and accelerating climate change. All pose challenges to women's equality and power. But the conference's mandate was also clear:

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Katiba Gali-Bukuru described how women in the Democratic Republic of Congo and other central African countries joined forces in a regional network to confront the violence of both armed militias and the governments fighting them. “With a strong foundation and network,” Bukuru said, “they can’t shut us down all at once.”

Sussan Tahmasebi related how the organizers of the One Million Signatures Campaign for women’s rights in Iran decided to separate the movement from the political process. Precisely because the campaign offers a peaceful strategy for change, the Iranian authorities have been tough on organizers, Tahmasebi said. “We have to create it ourselves and fight for it every day,” she continued, but the Iranian women’s movement is homegrown and derives strength from its local origins. The government can’t dismiss it as just a movement, she said. International support for the campaign has been limited, but it remains active and has expanded in recent months as women in other countries joined in and the media began covering it.

Aung San Suu Kyi expressed astonishment when she learned that Jody Williams had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. “When I was in jail,” she said, “I used to think about how it would be to win the Nobel Peace Prize. Now I’ve been awarded it, I’m not sure what to think.”

The day after the conference ended came a troubling reminder of how challenging the environment can be for human rights activists. Burmese Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi was arrested after a bizarre incident in which an American man swam across a lake to her home. The Burmese military junta charged Aung San with breaching the terms of her house arrest. She was taken to Rangoon’s notorious Insein prison and held for more than two years. After her release, she returned to the United States and then to the United Kingdom where she was granted asylum. She was later deported.

Abdul El-Sayed, who gave the opening address at the conference, described how the government of Iraq cracked down on the post-election dissent, jailing hundreds of civil society leaders and rights activists; arresting women and men, and holding meetings with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and members of the European Union. He said she remained in Iran, where she risked almost certain arrest. The government will continue its campaign of violence against women and men who try to challenge the regime, he said. “That is our situation,” he said. “We have to create an environment that allows women and men to speak out.”

Clearly, the conference provided a break for many women engaged in the day-to-day struggles for justice, equality and peace. At a Guatemala City press conference the four Laureates held to report on the conference outcomes, Rigoberta Menchú declared that even though the conference had come to an end, “our mission is not ending”. In every part of the world, she said, “women are censored and marginalized. They are kept outside, and their voices unheard.” The spirit of the conference was to help break this silencing and marginalization. Democracy should, she added, be about “fostering citizen participation.”

Jody Williams drew broader links between the women around the world. Those who had come to Guatemala and billions of other women around the world. “There are women in every part of the world who have been censored and their voices unheard. We have to create it ourselves and fight for it every day,” she said. “We have to create it ourselves and fight for it every day.”

In a memorable moment during the conference, Shirin Ebadi redefined democracy as not only a method of government, but as a culture. “We have to create it ourselves and fight for it every day,” she said. “We have to create it ourselves and fight for it every day.”

About a week after the elections, the Iranian regime cracked down on the post-election dissent, jailing hundreds of civil society leaders and rights activists. The authorities have been tough on organizers, but the Iranian women’s movement is homegrown and derives strength from its local origins. The government can’t dismiss it as just a movement, she said. International support for the campaign has been limited, but it remains active and has expanded in recent months as women in other countries joined in and the media began covering it.

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In a memorable moment during the conference, Shirin Ebadi redefined democracy as not only a method of government, but as a culture. “We have to create it within ourselves,” she said. “And then bring it to our families, to our country, to society, and international organizations.”

Mairead Maguire gave concrete form to the need to break out of sequestration. In late June 2009, Israeli authorities detained Maguire and 20 others as they tried to reach Gaza by boat with humanitarian relief aid. In their presence, a concrete statement of solidarity. They were later deported.

“SO MANY PEOPLE TODAY CAN LIVE IN WALLED ENCLOSES,” MAGUIRE SAID AT THE CONFERENCE’S CLOSING SESSION, NOTING THAT PARTICIPANTS, TOO, WERE BEHIND A WALL. WE CAN’T FORGET THE PEOPLE OUTSIDE, SHE ADDED. “WE NEED TO BRING DOWN THE WALLS.”
An international strategy meeting convened by the Nobel Women’s Initiative

WOMEN Redefining Democracy for Peace, Justice, and Equality

The Nobel Women’s Initiative

Launched in 2006, the Nobel Women’s Initiative is a strategic vehicle of the women’s Nobel Peace Prize Laureates to leverage the visibility and prestige of the prize to promote, spotlight, and advance women’s rights activists, researchers, and organizations worldwide addressing the root causes of violence.

In the past three years, the Nobel Laureates have been able to bring attention to the urgent issues of Iran–US tensions, Israel–Palestine, the climate crisis, the prolonged Burma violence and Sudanese conflicts, and many others – the primal media, radio, and Internet, and engaging with world leaders and activists in public fora. With the power of the Nobel Prize, these women are able to amplify and communicate new approaches to women’s rights, peace and security in ways that strengthen and expand the global movement to advance non-violence, justice and equality.

The conference was organized by the Nobel Women’s Initiative, in close collaboration with JASS (Just Associates), an international network working in Meso-America, Africa and Southeast Asia to strengthen women’s activist leadership and organizing power. The local host partner is the Rigoberta Menchú Tum Foundation (FRMT), an initiative of one of the Nobel Laureates, which promotes the rights of indigenous people around the world.

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CONFERENCE AIMS

- To assess critically women’s experience with democracy in different contexts, particularly in militarized and conflict situations;
- To develop fresh visions and practical alternatives for reclaiming and reshaping democracy to make it more meaningful for women;
- To forge new connections between women, inside and outside political institutions and contexts, for continued connections and collaboration;
- To build relationships between diverse organizations and leaders operating in different contexts and institutions to advance women’s rights, peace and democracy for a more sustainable future.

In order to meet these objectives the meeting will enable participants to:

- Take stock of important achievements and identify lessons for strengthened democracy and democratic processes, institutions, and actors committed to women’s rights and women’s rights activism firmly at the heart of agendas and support for democratization.
- Examine practical examples where women’s rights activism has substantively contributed to democratic gains and processes that promote equality, access to justice, accountability, and security, along with concrete steps for protecting women’s rights defenders who bear the brunt of backlash for their bold demands;
- Identify effective ways to frame and communicate women’s experiences, agendas and critiques of democracy to the public and through the media, clarifying the indivisible connections between democracy, women’s rights, peace, justice and protection of the environment;
- Build relationships between diverse organizations and leaders operating in different institutions and contexts for continued connections and collaboration; and
- Develop recommendations for how Nobel Women’s Initiative and the Nobel Laureates can put women’s rights and women’s rights activism firmly at the heart of agendas and support for democratization.

THE CONTEXT AND MOMENT

As the financial crisis produced by Wall Street ripples across the globe, the demands for more sustainable, equitable alternatives grow louder and more urgent. With the aim of contributing invaluable but often overlooked perspectives to this important debate about our future directions, the Nobel Women’s Initiative (NWI) is bringing together 85 women from around the world for a timely conference, Women Redefining Democracy for Peace, Justice and Equality. Held from May 10 to 12, 2009, in Antigua, Guatemala, this conference convenes women’s rights advocates, activists from national and international institutions – alongside Nobel Laureates and NWI staff – to examine critically women’s experiences and engagement with democracy from both inside and outside the halls of power in different contexts.

While democracy is highly contentious in theory and practice, there are currently more people living in formal democracies than at any other time in history. Despite democracy’s high contentiousness in different contexts, the majority of the population – have been a vital force behind democratic advancement efforts, in many countries democracy has served to legitimize efforts and actors committed to reversing women’s rights and limiting women’s freedoms. It is also in the context of democracy that a small, powerful elite produced the current financial and economic crisis, further destabilizing the world.

The many contested and unresolved elections around the world in recent years – from Kenya and Zimbabwe to Mexico and the USA – point to the limits of equating democracy with elections. Clearly, the ability of all people to exercise their rights and participate meaningfully in decisions affecting their lives is just as critical an element of the equation for successful democracy. By reflecting on women’s experiences as both participants in and drivers of democratic processes, and as actors resisting authoritarianism and navigating in liberal and conflict situations, the conference participants will explore alternative strategies and visions for achieving meaningful democratic change for a sustainable future.

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Women Redefining Democracy for Peace, Justice, and Equality

An international strategy meeting convened by the Nobel Women’s Initiative

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AGENDA

The agenda for the meeting will be organized around the following themes over the three days:

The state of women and democracy: historical trends, promises, reality, and future inspirations. The first day will be spent reviewing both the good and bad news about women’s experience with democracy in a variety of contexts. Presentations will assess how women have fared within the institutions and how affirmative action, quotas and other measures have helped or stopped short, and how women with different identities and contexts have organized outside of political institutions through feminist and other social movements to press for more inclusive, accountable forms of power.

Women’s practical experiences with democracy and democratization. The second day will explore women’s experience with elections and government; how women operate and organize in situations of conflict, post-conflict and militarism; and the important role of human rights in building effective democracies.

Vision and alternatives for the future. How do we capture, frame and communicate women’s experiences and agendas to the public and the media in a way that inspires new thinking and critical reform? During the third and final day, participants will hear from pioneering journalists and communications experts and explore how to both democratize media institutions and use the media as a tool to support women’s democratizing efforts. In addition, to draw on the experiences presented in previous days, the conference will conclude with learning from the visions and actions of young feminists, ecofeminism, and indigenous women, in order to chart possible directions for redefining democracy for peace, justice and equality.
Rigoberta Menchú Tum opened the conference on Mother’s Day by welcoming us to Guatemala, the multicultural land of the Maya, and honoured the participants who had endured long journeys. All of the speakers reminded us of those who could not be at the conference, whether due to visa or other travel complications. In particular, we were reminded of sister Nobel Peace Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, unable to join us because she continues to be illegally detained in Burma.

Dr. Rafael Espada, Vice President of Guatemala, welcomed us all on behalf of the President and First Lady, and on behalf of the Guatemalan people. Participants also heard special messages from sister Nobel Peace Laureates Wangari Maathai and Betty Williams, welcoming participants and expressing their disappointment at not being able to take part in the conference.

The attending Laureates began discussions which continued throughout the conference. Shirin Ebadi recognized that women’s rights are often the first things sacrificed in the interest of political negotiation and “security”, and asked why governments are so scared of women’s rights activists who only wish to have equal rights. She proposed that women’s rights would open the path to real democracy, which is not something that governments want.

Mairead Maguire said that we have given our governments the most dreadful power in creating a sense that violence is acceptable. She said we should never believe we have the right to kill someone else for the sake of our own security and that such an approach leads to violence all over. She called on us to take action to tell our governments that violence is unacceptable and that we support nonviolence.

Speakers: Liz Bernstein, Rigoberta Menchú Tum, Guatemalan Vice President Dr. Rafael Espada, Shirin Ebadi, Mairead Maguire, Jody Williams. With special presentations by: Wangari Maathai and Betty Williams

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WE NEED RADICAL THINKING, CREATIVE IDEAS, AND IMAGINATION."

MAIREAD MAGUIRE

IMPRISONED LAUREATE:
Aung San Suu Kyi and Burma’s Struggle for Democracy

Since a coup against the post-colonial democratic government in 1962, Burma has been ruled by a military regime. The peoples of Burma have called for regime change, with massive demonstrations each decade since independence and numerous individual acts of courage.

Burma’s political, humanitarian and human rights crises are among the world’s most severe. Since 1988, the regime army has destroyed over 3,000 villages and recruited an estimated 70,000 children as soldiers. Forced labour and violence against girls and women in all ethnic minority populations has been well-documented. The majority of ethnic groups live with limited access to food, health care and education, regardless of their political alliances. Over one million refugees have fled Burma in search of asylum, with another half million people displaced within the country.

As of February 2009, Amnesty International reports that there are more than 2,100 known political prisoners in Burma. The most famous of these, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, is the world’s only imprisoned Nobel Peace Laureate. In 1990, Suu Kyi was elected Prime Minister in a landslide victory. However, the junta prevented her from assuming this role and imprisoned her. Suu Kyi has been under house arrest for fourteen of the past nineteen years. In 1991, she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her nonviolent struggle to bring freedom and democracy to the people of her country.

On May 14, 2009, Aung San Suu Kyi was charged by Burma’s junta regime with breaching the terms of her house arrest because an American man swam across a lake to visit her. She was removed from house arrest and taken to the notorious Insein Prison. Suu Kyi was due for release from house arrest at the end of May. Her supporters have raised concerns that her arrest and ongoing show trial are only a guise for the military junta to sustain its political power leading into the country’s 2010 elections.

For the people of Burma, and particularly pro-democracy activists both within and outside of the country, Aung San Suu Kyi is a key source of hope whose courage inspires them to keep pushing for change that will bring about a better future for the people of Burma. Jody Williams encouraged us to think about the ways in which language is used and introduced a discussion of “other-ing”, which became a common theme throughout the conference. She said that by framing someone else as “the other”, we make it possible to oppress them, and that we need to challenge people who use words to justify the oppression of the other. Women have often been framed as “the other”, but so-called “women’s issues” are humanity’s issues.

Rigoberta recognized the hard work of all participants, saying, “You are women who struggle. That’s why we have not come here to give you advice. Rather, we have come here to ask you to give us advice. I would like to congratulate each of you – women of struggle, women of courage.”
WOMEN AND DEMOCRACY – THE PROMISES AND THE REALITIES

Moderator: Naomi Tutu
Speakers: Srilatha Batliwala, Anne-Marie Goetz, Alda Facio

The first panelist, Srilatha Batliwala, opened the discussion with an overview of a number of previous definitions of democracy. The first feminist definition of democracy, she said, involved women as humans and not as objects or pawns in creating wholes, and contended that women have an instinct for democracy because they have an instinct for wholeness. Srilatha proposed that it is only through group organization that the individual learns to be an effective political member. Srilatha continued to outline a way for women to define democracy, based around certain values. These included justice (equity and equality), peace and non-violence, sustainability, accountability, transparency, and asserting/claiming/resisting rights. She thinks that women have had greater impact in the latter, but that their contributions are rarely recognized as such. Finally, Srilatha contended that we must distinguish between the democratization of institutional processes and more informal processes. She thinks that women have had greater impact in the latter, but that their contributions are rarely recognized as such.

Anne-Marie Goetz agreed with Shirin Ebadi that women’s rights are often traded for peace. She is critical of the recognition of women in peace negotiations as a last bastion of exclusive decision-making. Both women and economic leverage in order to gain political leverage. Anne-Marie argued that more democracy equates to more women in office and increased transparency in governance. She spoke about the necessity 45% minimum parity zone for women in politics. While she acknowledged that competition is not fair and is the slowest system for achieving parity, she believes there is no real alternative. While quotas deliver gender parity at a faster rate, they may cut positions off from constituents (including women) and instead foster loyalty to a particular political party.

The plenary of participants was united in the view that we need to think about the kind of democracy we are trying to create. Is it feminist democracy? Inclusive democracy? Transformative or deep democracy? Srilatha argued that democracy is weakened by its clinging to the idea of majority rule. She says that we are all dealing with our own, inherent “majoritarianism”, and that “other-ing” people can lead to oppression by the majority. The plenary agreed that both democracy and peace must involve the recognition of all rights, including those of minorities.

Anne-Marie contended that democracy is really neither men nor women, but rather a state in which the sovereign people, guided by laws which are of their own making, do for themselves everything that is possible to do, and through delegates, everything that is not. She then introduced Naomi Tutu to speak.

Moderator Naomi Tutu began the panel by posing the question “What is the democracy that we say we are defining today?”

DEFINING DEMOCRACY

Panelist Srilatha Batliwala, of the Association for Women in Development (AWID), started us off with a number of existing definitions of democracy to reflect upon as we worked to redefine democracy.

WHAT THE MEN HAVE SAID:

“Democracy is a state in which the sovereign people, guided by laws which are of their own making, do for themselves all that they can do well and by their delegates do all that they cannot do for themselves everything it is possible to do, and through delegates, everything that is not.”
- Robespierre, 5th February 1794

“Democracy is a universally recognised ideal as well as a goal, which is based on common values shared by peoples throughout the world community irrespective of national, political, social and economic differences. It is thus a basic right of citizenship to be exercised under conditions of freedom, equality, transparency and responsibility, with due respect for the plurality of views.”
- Inter-Parliamentary Union, Alexandria Declaration, 1997

THE FIRST FEMINIST DEFINITION:

“Democracy is an infinitely including spirit. We have an instinct for democracy because we have an instinct for wholeness;...we have an instinct for democracy because we have an instinct for wholeness;...we have an instinct for democracy because we have an instinct for wholeness;...we have an instinct for democracy because we have an instinct for wholeness;...we have an instinct for democracy because we have an instinct for wholeness;...we have an instinct for democracy because we have an instinct for wholeness;...we have an instinct for democracy because we have an instinct for wholeness;...we have an instinct for democracy because we have an instinct for wholeness;...we have an instinct for democracy because we have an instinct for wholeness;...we have an instinct for democracy because we have an instinct for wholeness;...we have an instinct for democracy because we have an instinct for wholeness;...we have an instinct for democracy because we have an instinct for wholeness;...we have an instinct for democracy because we have an 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A question was posed to participants in plenary: What are the challenges and critical issues we are facing in advancing democracy from a women’s rights perspective? Participants then divided into eight small groups to share their thoughts with each other. Below is a synthesis of the diverse discussion that took place.

A number of groups started by examining the concept of a women’s rights perspective, and posed a number of questions: What is a women’s rights perspective? Does it have to do with femininity or our bodies? Is it different in some way than a citizen’s rights or human rights perspective? Who defines these rights?

Participants recognized that sometimes people are more apt to accept human rights language than feminist language. Feminism is not a fight against men; it is not a type of combat or a marginalized issue, but one of relevance and importance to all, including men. Groups agreed that we must overcome any stigma associated with the word feminism and make clear that supporting women is in the interest of all.

One problem that groups recognized is that we do not necessarily agree on a conceptualization of women’s rights. The achievement of women’s rights looks different to different people, and therefore progress is hard to measure. Differences in local contexts around the world are used to keep women apart and to keep them from demanding change. To this end, groups proposed that both regional rights charters and international discussion are important tools for advocating for women’s rights.

Groups also acknowledged that militarization continues to threaten democracy. Participants contended that the consequences of conflict have a relationship with the violence women experience in their daily lives. Just as the legislative agenda is affected by armed conflict, so are various areas affecting women’s economic, political, and social participation/stability. In other words, the object of patriarchy expands with armed conflict.

Political violence further impedes women’s rights and participation. Feminism, threats to human rights advocates, and conflict continue to obstruct democracy. Participants pointed out that even when we encourage women to enter the political arena, we forget to support them. Women need support because there is already a system in place that oppresses and excludes them.

Another important challenge that participants identified was the difficulty in women working to change structures when they are not represented as the decision-makers. Groups agreed that we must work to be present in all the spheres we are aiming to change. One proposal was to develop ideas as to how women can become more effective in changing structures, not necessarily by storming the hill, but by learning to negotiate within the existing framework and initiate gradual reforms from the inside out.

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Women’s Struggles for Democracy from Outside the Institutions of Governance and Power

Moderator: Malena de Montis
Speakers: Mónica Alemán, Lena Maeri, Hope Chigudu

Many conference participants recognized that we must construct a political force of women to carry out the transformations we propose for democracy. In this panel we explored women’s strategies, and challenges for democracies women want.

Perhaps the most important point stressed by the speakers was the need for dialogue and critique amongst ourselves and within our movements. Indeed, one of the themes that came up regularly amongst ourselves and within our movements. Perhaps the most important point stressed by the speakers was the need for dialogue and critique amongst ourselves and within our movements. Indeed, one of the themes that came up regularly amongst ourselves and within our movements.

Mónica Alemán and Lena Maeri focused on the importance of women’s movements and the need to construct a political force for women. Mónica emphasized the need for feminist movements to strengthen processes of dialogue with other movements to build on common points. She also stressed the need to continue the process of linking national and regional networks with international ones. Of course, Mónica pointed out, we cannot do any of this without building interdimensional dialogue, combining strategies, learning to listen and “...and sharing stories and information about our accomplishments as well as our shortcomings and failures.”

Hope Chigudu provided an interactive presentation based on the conversations she and other participants shared on their journey to Guatemala. She outlined a number of important strategies.

Lena Maeri spoke about the anti-colonial power relations between Western women and colonial women. She emphasized that colonialism is not just about land and resources, but also affects the daily lives of individuals and families by limiting their options. Lena argued that Palestinian feminists are excluded from mainstream western views of feminism because this feminism is associated with modernity, secularization and rationality, as well as a specific manner of agency and receiving norms of patriarchy. She said that a Eurocentric, colonial feminism presumes that women have the same interests all over the world, leading Western feminists to evaluate women in other countries according to their own interests all over the world, leading Western feminists to evaluate women in other countries according to their own values and standards.

As a result, women who wish to live an ethical Muslim lifestyle are conveyed as backward victims of patriarchy. Lena’s presentation and the discussion that followed emphasized that resisting oppression is not the same for all women. The challenge, she proposed, is to integrate both anti-colonial activism and feminist activism.

Mónica Alemán also addressed the issue of feminist movements in the contexts of colonialism and racism. She outlined a number of important strategies. First, there is an ongoing need for participation in the process of reconstructing peace for indigenous peoples. Second, there must also be effective political participation of women and indigenous peoples. Third, she suggested that schools be established for indigenous peoples to develop these capacities. Mónica offered the view that while indigenous women are people in resistance, they are also people of knowledge and wisdom, and these capacities must be built upon. She believes that indigenous women in particular must recover their history and that autonomy over women’s bodies and lands must be an underlying force for the growth of nations.

The Nobel Women’s Initiative believes that the aggression against Gazan civilians by the Israeli military is illegal, immoral, and counterproductive. We believe that holding the people of Gaza hostage because of the actions by Hamas is collective punishment, and a gross violation of international humanitarian law. We continue to call for an end to all violence and attacks on the Gaza Strip, for the United Nations to take immediate action to cease and monitor a ceasefire, and for the international community to Israel’s actions and take action to insist Israel end the military attack on Gaza.

The Nobel Women’s Initiative is in the starting stages of planning a delegation to Israel-Palestine in order to bring high-profile women to Israel and the West Bank, to draw attention to the situation of women in the conflict, and to highlight the contributions of women from the region to peace efforts.

June 2009 marked forty-two years of Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Gaza Strip and West Bank. The Nobel Women’s Initiative called for both resolutions and countrys calls by the international community for an end to the occupation have gone unheeded. The Israeli government continues to ignore its obligations under international law. Every new outbreak of violence demonstrates the inability and unwillingness of international governments to exercise their moral obligation to bring this conflict to a negotiated settlement.

After decades of Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Israel’s January 2009 attacks on the Gaza Strip significantly deepened an already dire humanitarian and human rights crisis for Palestinians.

The Nobel Women’s Initiative believes that the outbreak of violence in Gaza demonstrates the inability or unheeded. The Israeli government continues to ignore its obligations under international law. Every new outbreak of violence demonstrates the inability and unwillingness of international governments to exercise their moral obligation to bring this conflict to a negotiated settlement.
Mairead concluded the first day of the conference by reflecting on the personalization of democracy. She said that we are social animals and need to focus on building relationships with one another. We face challenges that past generations did not face because they did not live in a global community, and fear has become the biggest challenge to us all. Mairead encouraged us to balance the wisdom of the head and the wisdom of the heart. She believes the problems of the world today will be solved with wisdom of the heart.

“DEMONCRACY IS WHAT MY GRANDMOTHER WOULD CALL GOOD MANNERS.”
HOPE CHIQUDU

“DEMONCRACY IS THE FREE DETERMINATION OF OUR MINDS, OUR BODIES, OUR LAND AND OUR PEOPLE. IT IS A PARADIGM OF FREE DETERMINATION IN EVERY SENSE.”
MONICA ALEMÁN

“THERE IS NO ONE MODE OF FEMINISM.”
LENA MADU

CLOSING OF DAY ONE
Speaker: Mairead Maguire
Shirin Ebadi opened the second day of the conference by encouraging us to think of democracy as going beyond the vote. She reminded us that many of the world’s dictators were democratically elected, including the current regime in Iran.

In Shirin’s words, the support of the vote does not give one the right to act however one wants. She said that democratically elected governments must “… adhere to the rules of democracy and respect basic human rights, including civil, political, economic and social rights. Shirin also reminded us that people in democracies have the duty to protect and care for democracy, and these duties do not stop at the vote.

Instead, we must continue to work to bring a culture of democracy to society.

Marusia López Cruz provided a synthesis of the first day of the conference. She urged us to acknowledge both our diversity as well as the opportunity to work for solidarity. Marusia echoed the feeling from Day One that what is currently called democracy is not in fact real democracy. Instead, we are looking for substantive, deep, feminist democracy based on self-determination.

Marusia highlighted the idea that democracy begins with the tossing of the idea of “other”. We cannot speak about democracy if women are not able to exercise their full rights. We began Day Two of the conference with the idea that real democracy is an intergenerational and inclusive process.

“WE BUILD DEMOCRACY WHERE WE LIVE.”

MAIREAD MAGUIRE
Women's Experience with Elections and Government

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uring this concurrent session, Nurgul Djanaeva and the other speakers shifted the conversation from identifying the challenges to women’s political participation to citing specific examples where change has happened.

In terms of the challenges faced by women, Rigoberta Menchú Tum spoke about how women lack political culture of “Apropiarnos de los espacios” (appropriating spaces for ourselves). We recognize that we must also have more women at the local level to run for public office. The panelists noted that women do not run for office at the local level because they are afraid of opening themselves up to aggression, ridicule, and other attacks. They also do not believe that they are capable or qualified to run. Rigoberta reflected that during her candidacy, she was the target of threats, attacks and aggression, both from the media and from others who said that Guatemala was not ready for a woman president.

As a strategy for moving forward, Rigoberta spoke about creating her own political party with the aim of being part of changing the political and legislative culture in the country. As a result, the perceptions of women and of women’s roles are beginning to transform on a social and grassroots level. Eva spoke about how the high representation of women in government and civil service positions in Liberia has begun the process of changing the political and legislative culture in the country. As Minister of Justice, part of Eva’s role is to ensure that women have access to justice, especially in post-conflict contexts in which alarming high rates of rape and sexual violence are still prevalent. Part of her strategy involves specially training staff and personnel to investigate sexual crimes, and beginning a mentoring process with police and prosecutors. In addition, a new inheritance and property law promotes the rights of customary wives; other legislation that protects women’s rights is also being promoted.

The panelists agreed that part of a strategy going forward is to encourage, train and mentor more women in government who understand the need to work across partisan lines to build a common agenda. They emphasized that for this to occur, women in politics also need support and advice from the broader women’s movement. Barbara Lawton spoke about the continuing challenges to women’s political participation in the United States. The US currently ranks 93 in the world in terms of women’s participation in the legislature. According to Barbara, if a government is measured by the degree to which citizens are encouraged and willing to engage with the system and run for office, the underrepresentation of women in the US legislature casts serious doubt on the legitimacy of that government. Barbara reflected that women who are elected by their constituents act differently from those who are appointed by men, she realizes that those who are elected in their own right have more confidence. She also reminded participants that not all women address problems through the perspective of gender. She pointed to the recent example of Alaska Governor and former Vice-Presidential candidate Sarah Palin.

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GOVERNMENTS DO NOT TAKE THEIR LEGITIMACY FROM THE VOTES OF THE PEOPLE, BUT FROM BOTH THE VOTES OF THE PEOPLE AND RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS.”

SHRIN EBADO

“DEMOCRACY IS LIKE A FLOWER. YOU HAVE TO TAKE CARE OF IT.”

SHRIN EBADO

ON THE INSIDE:
Women’s Experience with Elections and Government

Moderator: Nurgul Djanaeva
Speakers: Rigoberta Menchú Tum, Eva Happy Morgan, Barbara Lawton

[Image 0x328 to 1585x613]
The second concurrent session began with a guiding question: “What can human rights contribute to building and deepening of a true democracy?” The moderator reminded us that democracy and human rights are ideals, a vision of how we want to live, govern and be with each other. She also suggested that we consider what we believe the state should do to support this fundamental vision.

Panelists and participants acknowledged that democracy and human rights are not static concepts. Instead, they are responsive to the social movements over time.

The panel discussed some of the limitations and possibilities in the existing human rights mechanisms. International and regional human rights conventions have established democratic mechanisms. The panelists pointed out that democracy and human rights are ideals, a vision of how we want to live, govern and be with each other. She also suggested that we consider what we believe the state should do to support this fundamental vision.

Panelists and participants acknowledged that democracy and human rights are not static concepts. Instead, they are responsive to the social movements over time.

Charlotte Bunch pointed out that democracy needs to be continually redefined and expanded from the perspective of women’s lives. It is not that we are not concerned with men’s lives but their perspectives are different. Charlotte believes that human rights mechanisms, including those within the UN, provide a practice of engagement with national governments through tools such as shadow reports and conventions. She said that such meetings are the exercise of women’s rights and democracy – monitoring governments and holding them accountable for what they should be doing.

Many participants were skeptical about their ability to work with the UN, given its focus on government institutions. Charlotte reminded us that the UN is made up of governments, and will therefore not do work for us. Instead, she suggested that the UN can provide tools to press for state accountability on equality. She recommended that we push the UN to fulfill its promise to women, including the promises set out in Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and Security Council Resolution 1325. Charlotte emphasized the need to build linkages between women working at the international level and advocates working at national and local levels in order to make our work more effective.

Julietta Montaño contended that it is important to bring our knowledge to the FRSP. If we want women to know what it is, we must make sure that women are aware of these mechanisms, they take advantage of them. Therefore, Julietta urged women familiar with these human rights tools to share this knowledge with women across the world. While acknowledging that social activists, especially women, are undergoing difficulties in their work, Leyla said that the challenges they face have provoked a change in strategy which has involved expanding the access of women NGOs to other issues. In addition, NGOs that are not related to the government are taking steps to provide information and help to other women. Leyla encouraged us that women are building on their own capacities and agency in this context.

While acknowledging that social activists, especially women, are undergoing difficulties in their work, Leyla said that the challenges they face have provoked a change in strategy which has involved expanding the access of women NGOs to other issues. In addition, NGOs that are not related to the government are taking steps to provide information and help to other women. Leyla encouraged us that women are building on their own capacities and agency in this context. The panelists agreed that it is important to understand the political struggle for contested public space in the UN as the same political struggle in which women are engaged in local and national instruments and governments around the world. Mechanisms such as Security Council Resolution 1325 are in place to assist in the struggle. While international pressure can bring support for the recognition of rights, it is local pressure for implementation that will galvanize action and lead to change. International mechanisms that support women’s rights are therefore subsidiary (or secondary) to national mechanisms. They do not replace the need for local and national mechanisms. Still, participants agreed, international mechanisms play an important role as Security Council Resolution 1325 is in place to assist in the struggle. While international pressure can bring support for the recognition of rights, the political struggle for contested public space in the UN as the same political struggle in which women are engaged in local and national instruments and governments around the world. Mechanisms such as Security Council Resolution 1325 are in place to assist in the struggle. While international pressure can bring support for the recognition of rights, it is local pressure for implementation that will galvanize action and lead to change. International mechanisms that support women’s rights are therefore subsidiary (or secondary) to national mechanisms. They do not replace the need for local and national mechanisms. Still, participants agreed, international mechanisms play an important role as Security Council Resolution 1325 is in place to assist in the struggle.
WOMEN ORGANIZING IN CONFLICT AND MILITARIZED SITUATIONS

Moderator: Karila Ramdas
Speakers: Sunila Abeysekera, Zaynab El Sawi, Lway Aye Nang, Katana Gège Bakuru

The women on this panel shared the struggles, trials and triumphs they have experienced in trying to bring about peace, equality and democracy in some of the world’s most difficult circumstances.

Sunila Abeysekera described her experience in the Sri Lankan context. She told us that one of the root causes of the existing conflict in Sri Lanka was the denial of democracy - the denial of dignity as equals, which resulted in the emergence of identity politics, and the creation of minority groups and division at all levels, from local communities to parliament. This situation has had a negative impact on the health, community, society and people’s ability to live as free women as minority communities struggle to defend their identities, with destructive consequences for health, community, society and people’s ability to live as free individuals. Sunila said that in such a context, it becomes difficult to organize women together across the ethnic divide into a united body.

Echoing the call from Mairead Maguire in the opening of the conference, Sunila also urged us to challenge the view of violence as a legitimate means of crushing dissent, together across the ethnic divide into a united body. Sunila argued that our challenge is to redefine democracy through the sharing of power, moving out of conflict and creating a new democratic structure within which minority/majority divisions cease to exist. She emphasized that when working with women in these situations it is vital to bridge the divide by understanding diversity, creating an inclusive and respectful space, building solidarity and forming alliances. In this way, women can work to define the concept of citizenship in a new democracy.

Zaynab El Gassri spoke about the ongoing process of involving women in politics in Sudan. After twenty-two years of civil war in which millions of people were displaced, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between South Sudan and Khartoum established parameters for democratic transformation. Leading up to the 2010 elections, the Sudanese women’s movement has been working for an increase in the quota for women in government from 8% to 30%. Zaynab described how, by working with civil society, political parties, and social forums, women achieved a participation level of 26% at all government levels in 2008.

"RIGHTS ARE ONLY REALIZED THROUGH POLITICAL ORGANIZING AND PRESSURE." - CHARLOTTE BUNCH

Zaynab illustrated some of the challenges the upcoming elections pose for the Sudanese women’s movement. While around the country’s recent census result (in which many Darfuri people were not counted), the continued patriarchal control over women, and a complex electoral process combined with a lack of widespread civic education, particularly among women.

Furthermore, to fulfill the 26% quota, women’s names will be drawn from a separate list of women candidates rather than a unified list of men and women candidates. Women prefer the unified candidate list to better guarantee of women’s security and the government’s commitment to the process. Nonetheless, Zaynab showed us that, in the face of all these challenges, Sudanese women are continuing to dismantle the patriarchal norms that hinder the achievement of their political, social and economic rights, necessary to the achievement of deep democracy.

Lway Aye Nang spoke of the ways in which Burmese women have been working against an oppressive military regime for several decades, fighting for democracy, human rights, peace and justice. The current regime claims to have brought peace to the country. All the while, the regime has continued to expand its military infrastructure, which has played a significant role in the increase in violations of women’s rights (sexual abuse, rape, especially in rural areas).

Aye Nang told us that the current constitution was drafted in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis, a process that did not involve any consultation with women. She emphasized that while this constitution promises formal equality, it provides no definition of what this means. One of the most fundamental flaws in the constitution is that guarantees that 25% of legislative seats will be held by the military and states that the country’s president must have military experience. Women are thereby excluded from the presidency, as they are not able to serve in the military.

Aye Nang also pointed out that the constitution prevents many people from voting, including nuns and monks, current and former political prisoners, and women with foreign husbands – in short, it excludes many pro-democracy activists (including Aung San Suu Kyi) from voting or running for office. Women’s groups successfully negotiated a minimum quota of 30% women in the constitution, the nation’s leaders claim that democracy should come before they will deal with women’s issues.

Aye Nang told us that the new Burmese constitution was drafted in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis. It was a process that was sorely inadequate because there was no consultation with women.
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Second, participants recognized that conflict changes the notion of citizenship, particularly if people are displaced. The concept of citizenship should therefore be broadened and must not be used to restrict the rights of those who are not deemed to be “citizens”. In the development of our new democracy, we must strive to fully understand and eliminate minority and majority groups, and to define the concept of citizenship to fit within our new definition of democracy.

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Finally, the panel attempted to address the issue of linking local organizations with the international community. Katana Gégé-Bukuru pointed out that the building of strong networks makes it harder for the opponents of women’s rights to shut down all work at once. The panelists agreed that the broader concept of, and struggle for, peace must be intricately linked with other more localized issues such as culture, tradition, and economics. They challenged us to think of practical ways that we can help to unite individual movements in countries with similar problems, in order to create a unified force for change.

In Sudan, a military coup in 1989 brought Omar Al-Bashir to power as the head of government. Since then President Al-Bashir has led an authoritarian regime that has repressed Sudanese people and exacerbated power struggles with various regions of the country over resources, power, and self-determination.

The United States has continued a counter-terrorism partnership with Bashir’s regime, and is exploiting a program of “constructive engagement”, despite calling Darfur’s violence genocide.

There are serious challenges for the upcoming 2010 national elections of Sudan. Organizations and local staffs of international organizations have been subject to harassment, interrogation and detention in an intensifying campaign aimed at dismantling Sudan’s independent human rights and anti-terrorism movements.

The Arab League and the African Union have provided President Al-Bashir with political and diplomatic support and continue to speak out on his behalf, particularly against the ICC’s case. China is the primary economic, military, and political partner of the government of Sudan. It has continued to provide cover for Bashir, even as the violence in Darfur has escalated and the Sudanese government has repeatedly defied the international community.

WILLIAM CATANA
From the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Katana Gégé Bukuru presented the issue of the political, economic and social challenges that continue to affect the status of women and to facilitate their subjugation. Katana described how post-conflict instability, military rule and exploitation of the DRC’s natural resources continue to threaten peace and security in the country. The result has been widespread displacement, lack of freedom of expression, the use of children in warfare, an increase in rape and sexual violence perpetrated against women and young girls, and the spread of HIV/AIDS.

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At the end of Day Two, a special panel on the situation of women in Guatemala provided participants with the opportunity to learn about our host country and its courageous women.

Guatemala is a country with 13 million people, with more than 2.5 million Guatemalans living abroad. While there are four main peoples in Guatemala, this multi-ethnic and multi-cultural country is comprised of 25 different ethnic groups, with 23 separate languages. More than half of the population have indigenous (Maya) roots. Recognizing the diversity within their country, the panelists argued that multiculturalism is the starting point in all social policy in Guatemala.

The Guatemalan political arena, however, does not reflect its multicultural nature. According to the panelists, the highly racist government aspires to be as masculine, and as white, as possible. Indeed, they told us that structural racism is rampant throughout the country.

The panelists also described the prevalence of great inequality in Guatemala. Chronic malnutrition and lack of access to education are major problems. Only 12% of indigenous peoples have access to primary or secondary school. In rural areas, the dropout rate is higher. According to a government project for educational reform, including the building of a Mayan university, have been stalled. The state’s obligation to prevent, investigate and effectively prosecute perpetrators of acts of violence against women.

During the 36-year civil war in Guatemala, there was a greater impact on women than on men, as women’s bodies were a tool of control of the conflict. The panelists emphasized, however, that women have played a critical role in social justice movements of Guatemala, both during the civil war and in the post-conflict period. During the war, women teachers played an important role in overthrowing the government. They also acted as both combatants and human rights defenders. When millions of people were forced to flee to Mexico as refugees, women refugees formed the Alliance of Rural Women, an organization that continues to work for a strengthened judicial branch.

Unfortunately, violence against women did not end with the end of the civil war in Guatemala. According to the National Police, in 2008 alone, 9,420 women were murdered. The failed Guatemalan military dictatorship of the 1980s was responsible for the sexual violence that occurred during the civil war. In addition, the failed Guatemalan state can no longer guarantee women’s safety. Violence against women continues.

Violence against women is a problem throughout the country. The failed Guatemalan state can no longer guarantee women’s safety. While a law against femicide was passed last year, “social cleansing” against women and sexual minorities continues.

Working with audios and for those who have been disappeared, women have been striving to create the opportunity for real reconciliation in post-conflict Guatemala. Violence against women are not mentioned in terms of specific guidelines regarding reparations for sexual violence that occurred during the civil war. According to panelists, such reparations are a debt that is pending in Guatemala.

Nevertheless, in a country with very high levels of criminal activity and in the face of rampant corruption in the justice system, women continue to work for a strengthened judicial branch. The panelists agreed that past and current crimes must be prosecuted and that all forms of violence must be eradicated. Recently, the Latin American branch of UNIFEM chose Guatemala as the launch site for an upcoming campaign to end violence against women. The panelists emphasized, however, that women have been striving to create the opportunity for real reconciliation in post-conflict Guatemala.

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VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN GUATAMALA

Based on Consecto de la Misión de Investigación de Denuncia, compiled by Radio Internacional Feminista, with additions by Marusia López Cruz and translated by Alejandra Bergemann

Women victims of violence in Guatemala often do not receive the justice they deserve. According to the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala, 96% of cases of femicide committed each year are treated with impunity. During the 2004 visit to Guatemala, UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Yakin Erturk, concluded that the state’s obligation to prevent, investigate and effectively prosecute perpetrators of acts of violence against women.

In May 2008, a Femicide Law was passed in Guatemala, defining femicide as “the murder of a woman within the framework of unequal power relations between men and women.” The Law establishes a 25-30 year sentence for those found guilty of committing femicide, creates safe houses for victims of violence, and names a Special Prosecutor to work effectively. However, women continue to suffer from violence and violence against women.

Unfortunately, violence against women did not end with the end of the civil war in Guatemala. According to the National Police, 726 women were murdered in 2008 alone. That same year, seven victims reported 155 of the 25,405 reported cases of domestic violence. Women victims of violence in Guatemala often do not receive the justice they deserve. According to the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala, 96% of cases of femicide committed each year are treated with impunity. During the 2004 visit to Guatemala, UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Yakin Erturk, concluded that the state’s obligation to prevent, investigate and effectively prosecute perpetrators of acts of violence against women.

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CLOSING OF DAY TWO
Speaker: Jody Williams

Jody Williams closed Day Two by reflecting on the power of language. The words we choose to use are important tools in communicating our message and changing people’s perceptions. She prompted participants to think about whether using terms like “fight” or “struggle” when referring to our work contradicted our attempts to view issues from the perspective of democracy and peace. She asked if perhaps we should use a term like “transformation” instead.

Most of all, Jody emphasized the need for us to communicate with those in power. She reiterated that women in government are only going to represent the interests of women if we are there, working with them and pushing them to act in our interest. Jody asked participants to remember that a government is no more than the people who are in it. Therefore, in order to be effective advocates, we must approach them from this perspective.

LIKE THE PHOENIX RISING OUT OF THE ASHES, WE CAN SUCCEED IF WE HARNESS OUR RESOURCES.
EVA HAPPI MORGAN

WE NEED TO THINK IN DEEPER TERMS OF WHAT WE MEAN BY DEMOCRACY, JUSTICE, PEACE AND EQUALITY.
JUANA VASQUEZ

WALKING TOUR OF ANTIGUA AND EL LABERINTO DE LAS MARIPOSAS

VIOLENCE COMES IN DIFFERENT FORMS AND DIFFERENT MANNERS OF EXPRESSION.
MAIZALENA CHOLÓTU

‘THE HEROINES IN THIS COUNTRY ARE THE WOMEN. THE ETHICAL CAPITAL OF OUR COUNTRY….THAT’S THE ROLE WE’RE PLAYING.’
REFLECTING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD:
TRANSITIONING FROM DAY TWO TO DAY THREE

Speakers: Marusia López Cruz, Alejandra Bergemann, Juliane Eberhard, Joanna Kerr

Anjandra Bergemann, Juliane Eberhard and Joanna Kerr provided summaries of some of the previous day’s sessions. They discussed the tension between women’s victimhood and women’s agency, noting some of the factors holding women back as well as the need for women to be in the places where decisions are being made, at local, national and international levels.

DAY THREE

{MAKING WOMEN’S STRUGGLES FOR DEMOCRACY VISIBLE AND FUTURE STRATEGIES AND STRATEGIES FOR RECLAIMING DEMOCRACY FOR WOMEN RIGHTS, PEACE AND JUSTICE

“REAL DEMOCRACY FOSTERS CITIZENSHIP”

JODY WILLIAMS

The speakers recognized that identity-based politics are often at play, and that we need to address power dynamics even amongst ourselves. They highlighted the importance of countering divisive, binary, “transcendent politics” and solidarity. Furthermore, they said that we must build partnerships with, learn from, and mentor one another in the pursuit of our goals.

Marusia López Cruz noted that Day Three was to focus on recommendations and moving forward. Malena de Monte and Srilatha Batliwala volunteered to collect recommendations and to draft a potential new definition of democracy, based on conference discussions.

“DON’T CARE IF YOU’RE PRESIDENT, THAT JUST MEANS YOU’RE WORKING FOR ME.”

JODY WILLIAMS

Nadia Bilbassy-Charters began the panel with the following question: Are media outlets really doing what they need to do in order to protect women’s rights? It was widely recognized that a free press is a key element for true democracy. However, women need to be better represented at all levels of media and communications, from reporting to development and editorial.

Jila Bani-Yaghoub spoke about the Iranian media context, where most women have been banned from newspapers. In Iran, the terms “feminist” and “feminist movement” cannot be used in the press, but women journalists still use language aimed at conveying these messages using other words... As told us that women’s issues are often trivialized as “personal problems”, and are therefore discounted as news. In many cases, when news regarding women is reported, what is printed is not the whole truth.

Women journalists were told that the problem was not that they were women; the problem began when they became independent women. Jila contended that in order to work for gender equality in newspapers, and due to the male dominance of this arena, Iranian women journalists had to challenge the views of their male colleagues.

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Ana-Coffin said that the recent, worldwide wave of privatization has led media to use more business models and the pursuit of profit. Furthermore, globalization has led to increased foreign control over media and communications. As a result, it has become increasingly difficult to find pluralistic opinions in the media.

Ana suggested that in order to challenge this reality, we must build political linkages of our own by connecting feminist issues throughout the world. These linkages can then be used as a tool in facilitating deep transformation. Ana emphasized that in order to make this possible, we must strive to make media and research communications more accountable. In particular, how can we make the media more accountable to women? Pat proposed that in addition to working to be represented on all levels of media and communications, we must also educate the consumer. The development of media policy is therefore a key strategy in getting the media to regulate itself.

Pat made pointed out that the media gravitate towards power in the production of ideas, image, and culture. Freedom of expression can be used to silence people and to sanction what is not pleasing. For example, the media tend to focus selectively on stories that are not pleasing. Freedom of expression means that we have a right to make people excited about participating in the democratic process as a whole.

WOMEN REDEFINING DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION

For the second small group discussion session, groups were asked to explore potential answers to two questions. First, What are the main messages about democracy that we want to communicate? Second, How can we make the perspectives and contributions of women more visible and influential? Participants again divided into eight small groups to share their thoughts with one another.

In terms of the main messages we want to communicate about democracy, groups made a wide variety of suggestions. While noting concerns within each country about the status of democracy, a number of groups offered some specific ideas about what that definition should look like.

One group brought forward the idea that democracy is us, the people behind it; it is both a process and a structure of inclusiveness. Participants agreed that we must move away from the majoritarian concept of democracy, and instead focus on democracy as citizenship. Furthermore, participants reiterated that we have to work to build democracy - it does not stop at the vote, but must also include engaging voices and participation, linked to human rights. Our challenge, then, is to make people excited about participating in the democratic process as a whole.

Moving forward, groups agreed that we must rebuild the institutions of democracy, including the state of law. Freedom of expression means that we have a right to dissent. At the same time, participants emphasized that we must be democratic in private spheres in order to have a democratic public sphere. Women’s contributions need to be taken into account at all levels.

In terms of strategies we can use to make the perspectives and contributions of women more visible and influential, a number of participants pointed out that we can better communicate with them. It was widely agreed that we can use alliances with both small and large media to affect change.

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In terms of strategies we can use to make the perspectives and contributions of women more visible and influential, a number of participants pointed out that we can better communicate with them. It was widely agreed that we can use alliances with both small and large media to affect change.
Participants also agreed that we need to take responsibility for telling and framing the story as we want it to be. Participants recognized that framing is important and that we may sometimes be caught in language that can marginalize us, (ex. “feminists,” “fighting a struggle”), compared to more inclusive language (ex. “building a movement”). Stories from an inclusive perspective become more effective in bringing about change. We acknowledged that we must make an effort to incorporate and reflect different “languages,” including male, female, and indigenous voices, including male, female, indigenous, and other voices. We can also learn to frame our stories in multiple ways in order to reach more people. We need to start where people are – mainstream media, (including advertising), will be more effective in bringing about change. Engaging a larger population in monitoring messages are often afterthoughts, but that they ought to be an integral part of the work we do.

In the small group discussion, participants agreed that we must work to train colleagues to be effective spokespersons for our movements in a variety of art and media. This group highlighted the importance of art as a means of communication, and advocated using all forms of art to communicate our messages and stories. It was also agreed that we must work to train colleagues to be effective spokespersons for our movements in a variety of art and media.

The women on this panel emphasized that, in order to do the work we envision for ourselves, we need to engage the existing institutional structures, even if they are currently discriminatory.

Lúcia Xavier spoke about the experiences of Afro-Brazilian women, and discussed ways in which we can make democracy meaningful for women from all races and backgrounds. Lúcia began her presentation by recognizing that violent and oppressive economic laws characterize our society. The normalization of this economic production model has made the marginalization of people appear natural. According to Lúcia, these forces collude to produce a social contract of intersecting discrimination, inequality, and the limitations of freedoms.

Lucia suggested a number of strategies to work for the transformation of these binding social relations and their institutions. First, we must increase women’s political participation rates and connect low participation rates to the issues of limited public service leadership and the sexual division of labor. Second, we must link justice with equality, and question the system of political values that perpetuates economic and social marginalization. Finally, Lúcia emphasized that women must be empowered in order to engage in these processes. Natalia Greene provided lessons from the recent Constitutional process in Ecuador. While Ecuadorian women were struggling with men for political power, they claimed other positions of power particularly within the environmental movement. These women identified the Western development model as an unsustainable one, where capitalism, exponential growth and extraction of non-renewable resources vastly exceeded the development of social capital, human capital and natural capital. Lúcia explained that by speaking about the planet as a whole, and therefore taking away the platform to speak about “other,” an inclusive discourse developed.

NEW PERSPECTIVES AND STRATEGIES FOR THE FUTURE: MEANINGFUL TO WOMEN, PEACE, AND JUSTICE

Moderator: Jessica Babihuga Nkuuhe
Speakers: Lúcia Xavier, Natalia Greene,
Solome Nakaweesi Kimbugwe, Susan Tathambo

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Solome also outlined other visions and strategies for moving forward. She described audacity as one strategy, in which women dare to speak the unspeakable – neo-colonialism, sexism – and are able to organize in the face of adversity in order to communicate the personal nature of women’s political agency. Another strategy Solome described was conveying the messages of feminism in a way that subverts the status quo and challenges stereotypes. Solome said that we need to illustrate that women’s struggles are not about despair, but about hope.

Sussan Tahmasebi spoke about the importance of focusing on accepting women’s rights as human rights. She contended that there is a very fine line between accepting and understanding cultures and justifying violence against women. Sussan said that the no longer supports the concept of cultural relativism because it justifies the continuation of the status quo.

Solome described the Iranian women’s movement as homegrown. She said that she no longer supports the concept of cultural relativism because it justifies violence against women. Sussan also spoke about the need for democracy to be built and maintained within movements themselves. The One Million Signatures Campaign has no staff – it is completely run by volunteers. Sussan explained that she and her colleagues have set up a network, the first sustained grassroots network created in response to the Iranian government’s violent repression of women’s rights activists. The Campaign aims to gather one million signatures on a petition demanding an end to the Iranian government’s violent repression of women’s rights activists and to gather one million signatures on a petition demanding an end to the Iranian government’s violent repression of women’s rights activists.

Since 2006, many women activists have been harassed, arrested and imprisoned for their participation in the Campaign. However, the One Million Signatures Campaign continues to gather one million signatures on a petition demanding an end to the Iranian government’s violent repression of women’s rights activists. The Campaign aims to gather one million signatures on a petition demanding an end to the Iranian government’s violent repression of women’s rights activists.

At the same time, Iranian women have also continued to fight for their equal rights against a repressive regime since the 1979 Revolution. The One Million Signatures Campaign is a landmark grassroots effort created in response to the Iranian government’s violent repression of women’s rights activists. The Campaign aims to gather one million signatures on a petition demanding an end to the Iranian government’s violent repression of women’s rights activists.
In the concluding panel, the four sister Nobel Laureates attempted to synthesize the issues and discussions that had arisen during the three days of the conference, and provide direction for participants moving forward. The plenary was based on conference findings. Rigoberta Menchú Tum described the conference as a guiding light for each of us. She recognized that democracy is not simply a method of government, but a culture that should be brought to every village. Rigoberta described our current culture as one based on war from childhood, where we learn history focused on the sanctity of war and neglectful of the history of peace. She urged participants to change this culture and to think about teaching future generations a culture of peace and democracy.

Shirin also emphasized the importance of dialogue and negotiation. She said that the other meaning of democracy is tolerance. Shirin highlighted the need for us to learn how to have real dialogue, to accept both friends and enemies. She said that such change starts with each of us, and that by changing our minds and making small changes together, broader change will occur. Judy Williams echoed Mairead’s call to take peace seriously, and said that if peace is “wimpy”, then she wants to be a “peace wimp” like her sister Aung San Suu Kyi. Jody Williams echoed Mairead’s call to take peace seriously, and said that non-violence is not simply “gentle politics”. She noted that we often lack belief in ourselves, and reiterated that we that should therefore have confidence in the value of our perspective and message.

The four sister Nobel Laureates thanked the participants, interpreters, staff and volunteers for joining them in Guatemala, and for making the conference such a great success.

Presented to participants at the close of the conference by Srilatha Batliwala and Malena de Montis.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
We would like to thank the following supporters of the Nobel Women’s Initiative. Without their generous support, encouragement and collaboration this conference would not have been possible.

* Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs  * University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work  * Lydia Cladek  * Ann Down  * Kathleen McIntire  * Nancy & Emily Word  

All of the Nobel Peace Prize Laureates of the Nobel Women’s Initiative: Jody Williams, Shirin Ebadi, Wangari Maathai, Rigoberta Menchú Tum, Betty Williams and Mairead Maguire.

We would also like to thank our board members, Joanna Kerr and Nancy Ingram, and our working group members, Brené Brown, Lisa VeneKlasen, Nayereh Tohidi, Avon Mattison and Shahla Haeri. Finally, we would like to thank our staff, our amazing interns, students and volunteers, our interpreters, our media and documentation team, and all of our participants for joining us! A special thanks to Shannon Sommerauer who wrote the report and put her heart and soul into it.

“WE NEED TO ENLIGHTEN OURSELVES WITH ALL THESE STARS AROUND US IN ORDER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE.” KIGERITA MENCHÚ TUM

“NONVIOLENCE IS NOT A WAY OF LIVING GENTLE POLITICS; IT’S A SERIOUS SCIENCE.” MAIREAD MAGUIRE

“LET’S GO BACK TO OUR MENTALITY, TO THE WAY WE LIVE AND LEARN HOW TO THINK AND PRACTICE BETTER. LET’S WRITE THE HISTORY OF PEACE FOR OUR CHILDREN.” SHIRIN EBADI

“I LOVE THAT FEMINISM IS SEXY.” JODY WILLIAMS

“WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE FOLLOWING SUPPORTERS OF THE NOBEL WOMEN’S INITIATIVE. WITHOUT THEIR GENEROUS SUPPORT, ENCOURAGEMENT AND COLLABORATION THIS CONFERENCE WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE.”

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‘Real’ Democracy Guarantees Equal Rights, Security and Peace

Nobel Peace Laureates Call for Global End to War on Women

-- (Guatemala, May 13, 2009)

Democracies around the globe – already threatened by the financial crisis and militarized conflicts – will be further weakened unless women’s rights are guaranteed. According to a gathering of over 100 international women’s activists, journalists and policy-makers – led by Nobel Peace Laureates Rigoberta Menchú Tum (Guatemala), Jody Williams (USA), Shirin Ebadi (Iran) and Mairead Maguire (Ireland) – at the conclusion of a three-day meeting to strategize about how women can reshape democracy to be more responsive to women.

“Democracy does not stop with the vote,” said Rigoberta Menchú Tum, who hosted the meeting. “Governments must be held accountable for protecting the rights of women everywhere – in both public and private spheres. Democracy must respect human rights – civil, political, social and economic rights – not just majority rule.”

Activists from Burma raised concerns over the upcoming elections in Burma, scheduled for May 2010. Burma’s democratically elected opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi is barred from running in the elections – and women are limited in their access to public offices and kept from running for president. Widespread violence against women, including the use of rape as a tactic of civil war, is ongoing in Burma.

The four Nobel Laureates joined the conference participants in calling for an end to all state violence against women, and the end of the harassment of human rights defenders. They also called for the protection of women and children in war and other conflict situations, including Gaza, Darfur and Burma.

The women at the conference agreed that violence against women limits their participation in democracy – and the lack of legal parity in national laws as well as the failure to adopt or conform with international laws is a big part of the problem.

The conference was organized by the Nobel Women’s Initiative, in close collaboration with JASS (Just Associates), an international network working in Meso-America, Africa and Southeast Asia to strengthen women’s activist leadership and organizing power. The local host partner is the Rigoberta Menchú Tum Foundation (FRMT), which promotes the rights of indigenous people around the world.
Shirin Ebadi: We create democracy within ourselves, bring it to our families, and to the country, the society, international organizations.

3:48 PM May 12th

The guarantee of individual rights is not enough, we need to push for our collective rights to participation as women.

3:14 PM May 12th

The base of the new Ecuadorian constitution is living well, not being better than. 2:18 PM May 12th

Those working against women’s rights have been skilful at bringing women into their ranks. Respect those women, but still tell our side.

9:42 AM May 11th

Charlotte Bunch: As women’s movements we have been developing, evolving and expanding human rights to reflect the real lives of women.

9:19 AM May 11th

Hope Chigudu: if democracy was a woman, what would she look like? 2:00 PM May 10th

We have to assess whether the democracy we want- inclusive, feminist, transparent- can thrive in the existing economic model.

11:33 AM May 10th

Jody Williams: As long as we’re talking about tolerance rather than acceptance, it will be easy to create an “other”. 9:26 AM May 10th

Wondering if the world is ready for the feisty feminist visions of democracy that will emerge from the Nobel Women’s Initiative conference. 5:50 PM May 8th

View our complete list of conference “tweets” and follow the Nobel Women’s Initiative on Twitter at www.twitter.com/NobelWomen

DEFINING DEMOCRACY FROM THE BOTTOM UP

by Anisha Desai

In Day-One’s morning conversation, we discussed the meaning of democracy from a feminist perspective—how it had been defined traditionally, through a patriarchal lens, and how it could be redefined to be more encompassing, holistic and deeply permeating to not only the political sphere, but also to the personal sphere of our lives. A sister from the Sudan remarked that while the conversation about democracy was interesting, it would have no bearing on the reality of the women she worked with, who are more concerned with the day-to-day material struggles of their lives. How was such a lofty conversation meant to impact them in a way that would produce real results? How could they possibly be asked to focus on conversations, which largely seem theoretical, in a space where the achievement of democracy seemed like a long-lost hope? This is an incredibly real concern for women everywhere, and is one not easily dismissed.

However, using Paolo Friere’s notion of conscientization, or critical consciousness, directly to the work of organizations for basic human needs is such an essential piece of movement building. It ensures that the people themselves are directly involved in shaping the constructs in which they operate. It ensures that “democracy” is not hijacked by the elite and remains accessible, socially and culturally relevant, and that it truly operates in the interest of the people it serves. Engaging with issues of “democracy” on the grassroots level from those who directly experience the failures of democracy is the only real way we’re going to be able to shape policies and practices that have integrity—that represent feminist values and are buoyed by a human rights framework.

In Day-One’s morning conversation, we discussed the meaning of democracy from a feminist perspective—how it had been defined traditionally, through a patriarchal lens, and how it could be redefined to be more encompassing, holistic and deeply permeating to not only the political sphere, but also to the personal sphere of our lives. A sister from the Sudan remarked that while the conversation about democracy was interesting, it would have no bearing on the reality of the women she worked with, who are more concerned with the day-to-day material struggles of their lives. How was such a lofty conversation meant to impact them in a way that would produce real results? How could they possibly be asked to focus on conversations, which largely seem theoretical, in a space where the achievement of democracy seemed like a long-lost hope? This is an incredibly real concern for women everywhere, and is one not easily dismissed.

However, using Paolo Friere’s notion of conscientization, or critical consciousness, directly to the work of organizations for basic human needs is such an essential piece of movement building. It ensures that the people themselves are directly involved in shaping the constructs in which they operate. It ensures that “democracy” is not hijacked by the elite and remains accessible, socially and culturally relevant, and that it truly operates in the interest of the people it serves. Engaging with issues of “democracy” on the grassroots level from those who directly experience the failures of democracy is the only real way we’re going to be able to shape policies and practices that have integrity—that represent feminist values and are buoyed by a human rights framework.

I recall the Black Panther Party’s breakfast program. It was a way to meet the immediate needs of the people while also building a base of folks who were committed to a struggle for racial justice. Their model gave way, in the United States context, to programs like that of the Chinese Progressive Association, which also adopted a holistic program of addressing human survival not as an afterthought, but as an essential component of the programming, while also engaging in popular education work that focused on the generation of knowledge from the bottom up. It is this kind of work, brought to global scale, that will help women to reclaim democracy and reshape it into something that they recognize, have ownership of, and feel invested in sustaining.
Five days before coming to Antigua, I stopped by my neighborhood salon and asked for a little bit of cut for me, where the ladies love to chat to each other as they cut scalps, push back cuticles and fight to straighten Egyptian curls. All the women come from working class families, so the salon is also a slice of Egypt that isn’t as easily accessible to expatriates like myself.

I was being manhandled by a new employee, and inherently I began talking about her family. She had a boy and two girls. Her son was about to get married to a girl he met a year ago. His future bride is young and sweet, she told me. Does he love her? I asked. She’s obedient, she replied. He told her, "wear the hijab", and she obeyed, he told her "no”; instead of defining what the hijab means for them personally, many girls will wear it out of social pressure by personal fear or favor. The issue of gender parity in our society is a challenge nationwide in Uganda. However, in northern Uganda it becomes a double problem for the women here. The stereotype that women are the “weaker sex” is reinforced violence and sexual abuse from the armed forces, their husbands and other men. Helpless, homeless and in a state of abject poverty, yet they never lost hope even on the other hand, the “powerful” men became more courageous, resilient, and objective. They proved that they are not less than the men.

The issue of gender parity in our society is a challenge nationwide in Uganda. However, in northern Uganda it becomes a double problem for the women here. The stereotype that women are the “weaker sex” is reinforced violence and sexual abuse from the armed forces, their husbands and other men. Helpless, homeless and in a state of abject poverty, yet they never lost hope even on the other hand, the “powerful” men became more courageous, resilient, and objective. They proved that they are not less than the men.

As a journalist, my job is to observe and recognize trends, and many times in my life I left wondering what it means for a society when women help to perpetuate their own suffering. Women seem to be socialized to feel shame and guilt in order to receive more than to give, to second-guess their abilities, and to restrict the power of their own voices. From reading the biographies of women like Sholeh-Esfah, Rigobera Mencho-Tum, and Betty Williams, and other intervening women activities on the communities, I’ve observed one main characteristics that binds them: a sense of entitlement, human rights, rights such as education, the vote, and fair treatment in court weren’t optional, they were a given for these women. And once this entitlement is realized, it seems their purposes fall into place. I am waiting to see what these powerhouses of change in Antigua. I want to ask them how women can be taught to regain that sense of entitlement to their rights and how democracy may be redefined to ensure the fairness it was meant to provide to all people living under it.

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This Noble Women’s Initiative conference in Antigua provides an opportunity for benchmarking and to rekindle the fire for a struggle for a peaceful and just world. For true democracy, for peace, justice and equality to become real, the role of women cannot be ignored. Women must look at democracy as something that builds all citizens accountable to it and to one another. A true democracy must be that which provides freedom of expression without fear or favor. True democracy is not a preserve of special people and offices. Instead, it must be looked at from a broad perspective that permeates all socio-political institutions, beginning from the smallest unit of the family, where equal rights must be pushed for, gender violence is condemned, respect for all promoted and women’s rights to participate in politics and in economic wellbeing, and in the family, then progress can be made at all levels of our society, and only then shall we have peace, justice and mature democracy.

The stereotype that women are the “weaker sex” is reinforced. Women proved that they are more courageous, resilient, and objective. They proved that they are not less than the men.

The stereotype that women are the “weaker sex” is reinforced. Women proved that they are more courageous, resilient, and objective. They proved that they are not less than the men.
powerless, frustrated and resort to drug abuse and violence. Such resilience and determination demonstrated the ability of women to lead and spearhead democracy and transform our society.

The role of women in fighting for dependable democracy has been witnessed. Many individuals and groups, irrespective of race, social status and religion, identified themselves with the suffering women in northern Uganda. Through them the voices of these women were heard. In a post-conflict society, the importance of the women is always disempowered. It took time for the voices of the suffering women to reach the Juba Peace talks. With support from many movements the peace movement reached Juba, and the Greater North Women Peace Initiative was born.

The government of Uganda has launched the Peace Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) to address the post-war conflict in northern Uganda. Unfortunately this program may not benefit and empower women economically. In a post-war situation it is crucial for post-conflict peace, justice and democracy in northern Uganda.

This is not to say that the war and war-related issues are unimportant. They need to be understood and brought to justice. The war affected women both directly and indirectly. They were killed, displaced or captured. Women have been forced to flee from their homes as refugees. Women have been raped, and some have been forced to join armed groups or to act as militia. Women have also been forced to become sex workers, begging, and harems, and red carpets in the trees. It was sometimes too beautiful to be indoors for the conference. We were able to see the fun side of these awe-inspiring women, who have made headlines with their work, and what they thought was still needed to make women’s voices heard.

The aim of the discussions was to find a new way to define democracy, one that didn’t end with elections or the vote, and one that worked for women.

By Hadeel al Shalchi

The government of Uganda has launched the Peace Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) to address the post-war conflict in northern Uganda. Unfortunately, this program may not benefit and empower women economically. In a post-war situation we need to understand and bring to justice the war and war-related issues that affected women both directly and indirectly. They were killed, displaced or captured. Women have been forced to flee from their homes as refugees. Women have been raped, and some have been forced to join armed groups or to act as militia. Women have also been forced to become sex workers, begging, and harem — I’ve heard that Antigua isn’t where you go to

Equatorial Guinea is very far away if you live in Egypt. So far, that one probably would never think of traveling there — unless, perhaps, one is invited to a conference as I was a couple of weeks ago by an organisation called the Nobel Women’s Initiative. The initiative is a group seeking to promote peace and justice for women everywhere. It was founded by Rigoberta Menchu Tum, Wangari Maathai, Rigoberta Menchu Tum, Wangari Maathai, the 1992 and 1980 Nobel Peace Laureate for her human rights work in El Salvador and Kenya, respectively. The initiative is a group seeking to promote peace and justice for women everywhere. It was founded by Rigoberta Menchu Tum, Wangari Maathai, of women for equality in her home, Iran, and how she refused to be thrown out of her country so she could try to change it from within peacefully. She has a soft and smiley demeanour and yet surprised me with her strong voice and speech about non-violence and her work, and one that worked for women.

Every two years they hold a conference at which women from different walks of life are invited to join a discussion and to share their stories about their work, and to reconnect with women about what they are hoping to achieve. This year Rigoberta Menchu Tum hosted the meeting in the stylish town of Antigua, Guatemala. I was happy to surprise her to see the invitation in my e-mail inbox this year, and jumped at the chance to visit this country and to meet the women behind the initiative. We have made headlines with their bravery and strength.

The trip to Guatemala from Cairo is a traumatic one. After two days in New York, a day later then another stopover in Miami and then finally Guatemala City. But it’s really worth it when you fit the challenges of Antigua, and the colour and walls of gates and homes and shops. I’ve heard Antigua isn’t where you go to

find the “real” Guatemala, but I was still happy to be there. The hotel we stayed in was a converted monastery — so beautiful that at one point I just stood up, looked out over the red parrots in the trees, and hang with governments, and with attitudes towards women’s abilities.
APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS

Juan Pablo
UNESCO/Cuba

Anne-Marie Goetz
Peace People, Northern Ireland

Begona Lasagabaster
Member of Parliament, Ghana

Applicants

Julieta Fernández
Just Associates, United States

Jay Addlesberger
Family Violence Prevention Fund, United States

Ann Patterson
United States

Laura Falcone
International Indigenous Women’s Forum, United States

Kathleen McIntire
Pachamama Alliance, United States

ENI

Barbara Siderius
ILED, Brazil

Cynthia Lyles
New England Women’s Convention, United States

Gylini

Rodrigo Alonso
Decisional Council for Children and Youth, United States

Hadi Al-Salem
New York, United States

Carolina Espinosa
New York, United States

Gregory Kemp

Soweto Women’s Charter, South Africa

Jana fans

Marina Ramirez
Reporters Against Violence, United States

Kris Kurose

Rebecca Larson
Women’s Fund for a Just Economy, United States

Kathy Goodwin

Mia MacDonald
Crisis Centre, United States

Moira MacIntyre

Shirin Ebadi
Nobel Women’s Initiative, Iran

Mona MacNeil

Sue Kedward
Nobel Women’s Initiative, United States

Mareli Marquez
Nobel Women’s Initiative, United States

Yvonne Williams
Nobel Women’s Initiative, United States

Molly Malekar

Clare Melford
Corporate Women Liaison, United Kingdom

Carlos Woldez
Nobel Women’s Initiative, United States

Nancy Basili
The ChildTrauma Academy, United States

Dina Johnson
Washington State, United States

Sister Sojourner
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Annette istediği
Nobel Women’s Initiative, United States

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Bahrain, United States

Nadia Bilbassy-Charters
One Million Signatures Campaign, United States

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Latifa Muntadhar
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Mary Lynne
United States

Roxana Torskey
Women’s Initiative, United States

Renate Tschirner
Women’s Initiative, United States

Lana Yeganeh
United States

Mónica Alemán
Women’s Forum MeranO, Italy

Sofia Ola
California State University, Northridge, United States

Marta Auges
United States

Eva Mappy Morgan
La Ruta Pacifica de las Mujeres, Colombia

Heather Gates
Gender in Women and Sustainable Development, United States

Marché Justice,

Gladys Torres
UNIFEM – Latin America and Caribbean, United States

Sister Solome
Women’s Initiative, United States

R. Tim наблюда
Women’s Initiative, United States

Andrew Walker
L’Express, United States

Kathleen C. Idowu
Ministry of Justice, Liberia

Kathleen Smith
Nobel Women’s Initiative, United States

Joycelyn Benson
New York, United States

Heather Barnett
Nobel Women’s Initiative, United States

Leticia Carrillo
Women’s Initiative, United States

Saulo Ribeiro
Nobel Women’s Initiative, United States

Reni Obi
Libya, United States

Evelyn Omoyeni
Women’s Initiative, United States

Jennifer M. Fox
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Carrie Wilson
Peace People/Nobel Women’s Initiative, United States

Shirin Ershadi
Nobel Women’s Initiative, Iran

Solen Maikel
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Maria Luisa Ahern
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Nadia Bilbassy
One Million Signatures Campaign, United States

Mary Lynne
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Soraya Broukhmoun
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Nadine Riba
Women’s Rights, United States

María del Carmen Pérez
Women’s Initiative, United States

Lino Sánchez
Women’s Initiative, United States

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Irene Rodriguez
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Priscilla Tanumihardja
KemenPerempuan, Indonesia

Liliana Brezzi
Women’s Initiative, United States

Roxana Torskey
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Yvonne Williams
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Cristina Chavarria
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Amelia Buchs
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Fernanda Iturriza
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Evelyn Omoyeni
Women’s Initiative, United States

Dana Gondreau
Women’s Initiative, United States

Gustavo Bartolome
Women’s Initiative, United States

Theo Gadd</n>
Statement Objecting to Travel Bans Imposed on Iranian Women’s Rights Activists
Preventing their Freedom of Movement and Association
We the undersigned, participants at the international Nobel Women’s Initiative Conference “Women Redefining Democracy for Peace. Justice and Equality,” which took place in Antigua, Guatemala, May 10th - 12th, would like to express our strong objection to the travel ban imposed on Ms. Nargess Mohammadi and Ms. Soraya Azizpanah, two of the women’s rights activists who were scheduled to participate in this event. These two women were prevented by Iranian authorities, in an illegal manner, from exiting the country and participating in this international event which draws participants from over 30 countries. We request the government officials, in particular the honorable head of the judiciary, to take immediate actions to remove the travel ban imposed on these two women’s rights activists and to return their passports, allowing them freedom to travel and associate with colleagues across borders.

Free Burma’s Political Prisoners Now!
“Until all of our political prisoners are free, none of us can say that Burma is now truly on the road towards democratic change.” Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, 1991 Nobel Peace Prize Winner, held under house arrest for thirteen of the last nineteen years.

The military government – the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) – must immediately and unconditionally release all political prisoners, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, Kuki Thun Do and Htin Kyaw. The release of all political prisoners is the first and most important step towards freedom and democracy in Burma. We, the undesignated, call upon the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to make it his personal priority to secure the release of all of Burma’s political prisoners by the SPDC.

Declaration in Support of Guatemalan Women

Guatemalan women struggle in a context of insecurity and violence that they have faced throughout history and continue to face today. We will not forget all of the women, the majority of them indigenous women, who were victims of sexual and other forms of violence during the internal armed conflicts, and who were also victims of the murder of more than 1,500 women between 2001 and the present, of which only 14 cases have been tried and the perpetrators brought to justice. The growing re-militarization and proliferation of weapons throughout the country only reinforces the wall of impunity that encircles Guatemalan society and affects women in particular because they face multiple levels of violence. This context has produced a constant war against women that is characterized by gender-based violence on the streets, at home and in the workplace. Women human rights defenders also confront harassment and violence in their struggle for justice. In the face of growing danger to themselves, they lack a minimal level of safety, which is the government’s responsibility to provide, so that they may be able to carry out their important work for democracy, justice and peace for all.

We believe that Guatemalan women embody a mosaic of diversity and multiculturalism that is a rich resource for the society in which everyone can live with respect. They strive for a whole of society, amidst enormous challenges and low visibility to the immense contributions that women’s struggles have made to these processes nationally and internationally. Our discussions underscored that democracy and peace are interconnected and that neither can be achieved without the full participation of women.

We stand with all the women, men and institutions everywhere committed to human rights in our desire to provide, so that they may be able to carry out their important work for democracy, justice and peace for all.

We urge the Guatemalan government to uphold its commitment to ending impunity and addressing violence against women in Guatemala.

We call upon all states and multinational institutions to recognize that the democratization process is incomplete and does not end with elections. No country or society can claim to be democratic when the women who form half its citizens are denied their right to life, to their human rights and access to humanity: the family; the community; the clan, tribe, ethnic or religious group; political, legal, economic, social and cultural structures; and the media and communications systems.

But our search for justice is continually overwhelmed by the violence perpetrated upon us, by the exploitation and colonization of our bodies, our labour and our lands; by militarization, war and civil conflict; by persistent and increasing poverty; and by environmental degradation. All of these forces affect us, and our children, far more severely and in many ways.

We know that democracy that comes from the heart is not just our lives, but all society – and we will not be silenced until it is achieved in every part of the world.